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A tale in stone and bronze: old/new strategies for political mobilization in the Republic of Macedonia

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The redesign of Skopje's main square and the wider central area in the last six years has been a top priority of the Macedonian government. The project, called Skopje 2014, provoked intense domestic debate and controversy as well as international reaction and concern. Although officials say that project's aim is to unify ethnic Macedonians, it has produced several lines of political, intra-ethnic/interethnic as well as intra-cultural/intercultural divisions in the fragile Macedonian society. The aim of the paper is to offer reflections about its mobilizing potential among ethnic Macedonians in a set of social, economic, and political contexts. In that sense, four areas of mobilization are suggested: (1) around new identity markers; (2) around the name dispute and against threats (real or imagined) to the ethnic and national identity; (3) against the internal Other, that is, the ethnic Albanian community, as well as critics of these identity politics; and (4) in reaction to the global financial crisis and problems within the EU.

Keywords: Skopje 2014; mobilization; ethno-national identity; antiquization; historical myths; monuments; Other; euro-skepticism

Introduction

"Sorry Skopje, they are stronger"
(Street graffiti near the redesigned main square in Skopje)

On 18 October 1842 Bavaria's King Ludwig (1825–1848) and a crowd of people stood proudly in front of a materialization of the mythological Walhalla, near Regensburg in the south of modern-day Germany. He had waited for that day for more than 15 years. The impressive building was to be a memorial for a long line of illustrious German/Germanic figures stretching from the first century AD, when Arminius (or Hermann), the leader of a small Germanic tribe, destroyed the Roman legions in the famous battle of the Teutoburg Forest. From the inside the memorial was all about the German national idea, but on the outside it closely resembled the Athenian Parthenon. The king was an admirer of Greek Antiquity and the Germanic Middle Ages. The neoclassical building, with its multitude of busts of important national figures, was a medium for his political message of future national unification, which he wanted to send out to his divided compatriots. Analyzing the nineteenth-century European monuments (including Walhalla and German Romanticism), Aleida Assmann argues that monuments and anniversaries connected to them were the most important media for addressing or manipulating national memory in those

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times. The monumental imperative of Walhalla made in stone, Assmann stresses (2002), was: "The German should leave it as an even greater German, better than he was when he entered it."

Some 168 years later and more than 1000 kilometers away, in a completely different sociopolitical context, the conservative government of the Republic of Macedonia proudly presented its new, expensive, and expansive project, Skopje 2014. In fact, since the coalition of mainly right-wing parties, led by VMRO-DPMNE and its main ethnic Albanian political partner, the Democratic Union for Integration, came to power in 2006 (re-elected in 2008, 2011, and 2014), first invisibly, but later more "transparently," a discursive (re)construction of the Macedonian national and state identity has started. One significant aim of this top-down effort is to create and legitimize a new internal and external image of the independent country. Greece's veto of Macedonia's invitation to join NATO in 2008 added fuel to the fire. The project draws extensively on neoclassicism and on a primordial vision of national history, orbiting around a monumental equestrian statue of Alexander the Great, officially named "A Warrior on Horse."

As a "building revolution" the project consists of bronze and marble statues, fountains, facade renovations, new buildings, and bridges in the center of Skopje. At its core is a kind of "historical triangle" or "national trinity" represented by a new museum of wax historical figures with, probably, the longest name in the world (*Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Statehood and Independence: Museum of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime*)[1]; the new building of the Archaeological Museum (together with the State Archive and the Constitutional Court); and the refurbished main city square "Macedonia," acts as an open-air national pantheon. Stuck in the middle of this newly created historical section, only the Ottoman Stone Bridge remains as an authentic artifact from the past. The government says the six-year project costs around 200 million euros, but the latest research (BIRN 2016) reveals a sum of around 670 million euros of taxpayers' money, which is, in either case, a tremendous amount for a small and economically modest country.[2] Prior to the announcement and the start of the project, there was no open civic or professional debate on public expenditure, use of public space, its political, cultural, and historical significance, or other relevant issues. Subsequent debates initiated by architects, liberal intellectuals, and civil activists were discounted. Legal procedures and practices were bypassed, and interethnic and political implications were ignored.

Skopje 2014 is the most visible part of the broader phenomenon of antiquization or anticomania (even archeophilia[3]), which is based on the premise that there is a link between present-day ethnic Macedonians and ancient Macedonians. Political and social actors who support the process are convinced that these identity politics covered by the term antiquization "unite" the entire (ethnicized) Macedonian past, excluding the Ottoman part, in order to mobilize national pride (Vangeli 2011). On the other hand, critics of the process use the term in a pejorative sense by ridiculing the political usage of the myth of ancient origin, as well as the myth of victimization. In both domestic and international political relations the project was at the center of intense disputes and controversies.[4] It created strong divisions along several lines: among ethnic Macedonians ("patriots" vs. "traitors" and "ancient" vs. "Slavs"); between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians; between Macedonia and Greece; as well as among academic circles such as archaeologists, historians, architects, etc. Skopje 2014 carries strong political and symbolic messages that can be studied along different lines (in terms of symbolic nation-building, state capture, semi-authoritarian rule, nationalism, interethnic relations, rebranding,

etc.).[5] In this paper, we chose to focus on the project's capacity for political mobilization among ethnic Macedonians.

Our paper has two aims: to offer reflections about the mobilizing potential of Skopje 2014 in a set of current social, economic, and political contexts, and to open wider discussion in the humanities and social sciences about this ongoing phenomenon. Hence, we ask why and how this vision, which "stands in contradiction to the real time and to the environment in which it occurs, not only in ideological, historical, and aesthetic, but also in an economic sense" (Bugjevac 2010), can serve as a tool for political mobilization of ethnic Macedonians. In that sense, we suggest (at least) four mobilizing axes: (1) around new identity markers; (2) around the name dispute and against threats (real or imagined) to the ethnic and national identity; (3) against the internal Other, that is, the ethnic Albanian community, as well as critics of these identity politics; and (4) in reaction to the global financial crisis and problems within the EU.

From historical myth to political mobilization

Stories of glorious forefathers, heroism, golden ages, or cultural peaks have enthralled ordinary people and their leaders through the centuries. There is something in dramatic mythological figures or stories that touches people's emotions, and even moves them to action. Antiquity and the Middle Ages are a frequent source of such exemplary stories and symbols. Like Ludwig's Walhalla memorial, nineteenth-century Europe saw a number of inaugurations of grandiose national-romantic "shrines" that bore important cultural and political messages: the Pantheon in Paris (1791), the Heldenberg memorial in Austria (1849), the Wallace monument in Scotland (1869), the Hermann monument in Germany (1875), etc. They remain visual reminders of the age of nationalism; symbols of mythological views on national history.[6]

The use of political and particularly national myths in contemporary politics is mostly related to anachronistic phenomena. According to Anthony Smith, skillful use of the past enables elites to orchestrate a popular/populist political mobilization, to legitimate unpopular social changes and political measures, to create a public moral codex, to rationalize resentments and irredentism, as well as to interpret and reinterpret existing myths (Smith 1997; Vangeli 2011). In line with Smith, Schöpflin (2000) claims that the instrumentalization of these national myths and symbols is crucial for maintaining state power, thus stressing their mobilizing capacity.

On the other hand, following recent trends in the study of nationalism and politics, Graan (2013) suggests that the type of "nation branding" sponsored by the Macedonian government also indicates a new modality of neoliberal governance. The project is not only a symbol of nationalist ideology, but also in the eyes of the government,

> an investment in Macedonia's international recognizability and competitiveness in a global marketplace. Specifically, the project has been positioned as the cornerstone of broader government efforts to construct a *nation brand*, and a positive image for the country among desired international publics. (Graan 2013, 161–162)

However, what we find particularly relevant for this case study is the mobilizing potential of political and historical myths. Bottici (2007), in her seminal work on political myth, argues that its main function is not only to map/explain the world or to provide significance to a group of people in a given sociopolitical context, but also to call them to action, emphasizing its performative and moral dimension. In his discussion of revolutionary myths, Sorel (2004) argued that at its core a myth is not a description of things but an expression of a will to act. It is this point, together with Blumenberg's (1985) notion of *Bedeutsamkeit* or

significance, which gives the myth its *raison d'être* for a given community. Along these lines, Skopje 2014 can be seen as a set of symbols engaged in a mythologized historical narrative whose function, in basic terms, is to give significance to a group of people and to mobilize them for political action.

What Sorel's conception of (syndicalist) myth anticipated is exactly the reinvention of the logic of contingency as the underlying principle of any social formation. Against the theoretical tradition of classical revolutionary Marxism and its belief that the logic of necessity, the objective laws of history, and economic teleology determine all social struggles and subject positions, Sorel believes that identities are indeterminate formations dependent on mythical fixation derived from a political struggle, and not "objective" facts derived from the economic position of individuals and groups in the system of production. His philosophy and concept of political mobilization made Sorel acceptable and applicable by both leftist thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, whose concept of hegemony is influenced by Sorel, and by many fascists (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). In terms of Sorelian intellectual legacy from the beginning of the twentieth century, what is actually at stake in Skopje 2014 is the ethno-populist mobilization around vague, indeterminate, and ambiguous symbols and myths, whose objective is to discursively re-aggregate and re-articulate the national identity of ethnic Macedonians out of a social terrain that is inherently heterogeneous and indeterminate.

Macedonia's state-sponsored populist narrative represents, in a narrow sense, a plurality of positions that exist in society. These symbols of the populist discursive expression offer a field for inscription to heterogeneous social elements that share only a frustration with the status quo. Populist discourse does not articulate preexisting identity, but is a rather performative discourse constituting identity as such. Isn't it all just a narrative, mere false rhetoric, with no real mobilizing capacity? If the answer is no, as we claim, we have to assume that discourse is the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such, as Laclau (2005) does.

How is this discursive formation cemented, held together? What makes it more successful in articulating and sustaining social identity than the alternative discursive formations, in our case the liberal vision of society offered by Macedonia's political and civil society opposition to the antiquization? The answer might be found in the nature of the populist symbols inscribed in Skopje 2014, which we suggest operate as *empty signifiers* around which a plurality of social demands is condensed. Empty signifiers offer relative fixity to the newly established discourse, a field for inscription of political demands. They actually operate as *point de capiton*, to use Jacques Lacan's terminology. Indeed, the empty signifier is also a partial element that has taken on the role of what in theoretical psychoanalysis is referred to as an *objet petit*, or a small thing that is a proxy for mythical (social) fullness through manipulating affective dimensions in the individuals interpolated by a certain discourse.

Mobilization axis 1: between sentiment and resentment, or the paradoxes of the politics of memory

Just one look at the conception of this vision reveals the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 2008) of the new identity paradigm whose aim is to redefine the term Macedonian and to offer a new answer to the question: Who are the Macedonians?

We suggest that in the context of self-perception and self-identification, Skopje 2014 addresses three basic messages that hit a nerve for many ethnic Macedonians. Regarding the insulting claim: "You are an invention of the Cominform and Tito," the answer is:

"We are the descendants of Alexander the Great!"; to the expression: "You are *Makedončinja* (a diminutive form of the ethnonym Macedonian),"[7] the answer is: We are Macedonians with capital a M!"; to the feeling of cultural inferiority or marginalization toward Western Europe, the answer is: "We are a part of Western civilization, too." We shall briefly address these three points separately.

Ancient Macedonian aspect

The central figure, set in a "classicist frame," in this Macedonian case of monumentalism is a 24-meter-high sculpture of Alexander the Great on the right bank of the Vardar River. On the opposite bank is another tall monument – a statue of his father, Philip II, standing on a column, whose base represents the royal family (Philip, Olympia, and the infant Alexander) guarded by lions. This visual link to the famous royal family of the ancient Macedonian kingdom provides the necessary pedigree to the claim for ancient roots. In the newly created top-down myth of origin (accompanied by the myth of the Golden Age), Macedonians are no longer descendants of medieval Slavs and Tito's Yugoslavia, but of the ancient people and the great ancient state – the Kingdom of Macedon.[8] To many ethnic Macedonians, Alexander's status as a figure of world importance is a well-justified reason to recognize him as a remote ancestor (Vangeli 2011). At the same time, the rather traditional Macedonian society and conservative government "forget" or choose to forget Alexander's bisexuality, which they would view as an unacceptable trait for a forefather, national hero, and role model. As Ernest Renan famously argued back in 1882, a nation selects not only what should be remembered, but also what should be forgotten (Renan 1995).

   Instead of questioning this nineteenth-century nation-building paradigm, certain mainstream historians, archaeologists, artists, and journalists (as well as many amateurs and self-proclaimed "prophets") work hard to "return the memory to its rightful place."[9] Actually, since the early 1990s amateur/pseudo-historians have published books on the ancient, even prehistoric, roots of the Macedonian nation, but they remained on the margins of the country's cultural and political life (T. Belchev, A. Donski, A. Markus, V. Iljov, and others). They were not widely read and were not used by politicians at that time. In the last several years, however, the conservative government opened up considerable space in the pro-government mainstream media for these pseudo-theories, this time pushed by certain scholars. According to this view the Macedonians have forgotten their genuine past due to: (1) the so-called birth order of the nations in the Balkans when Greece via Europe managed to monopolize Alexander the Great (including the name Macedonia) and (2) "disinformation" about the Slavic origins of the ethnic Macedonians by the Yugoslav (and Macedonian) Communists. The new view on statehood continuity, however, now includes a more strengthened imperial pedigree and is further underlined with the visualization of two medieval rulers – the sixth-century Byzantine emperor Justinian and the medieval tsar Samuel – in the series of statues on the main square. The critical voices among historians, archaeologists, linguists, and art historians (such as V. Sarakinski, N. Proeva, I. Stefoska, N. Čausidis, M. Stankovska-Tzamali, P. Kostovska, J. Koteska, and others) made no difference in the construction of the new national canon.

   The early attempts of a nationalist revision of the history of ancient Macedonia were then followed by an initiative in the early 2000s by the linguist Ilija Čašule and the Institute for Strategic Research 16:9, which, following in the steps of their Greek homologues (missionaries to the Kalash people), organized a mission to Pakistan in order to seek alleged Macedonian roots among the isolated Hunza people in the Hindu Kush mountains (Neofotistos 2011). This effort was later supported by the new conservative government in 2008,

which financed a visit by the Hunza royal family. The year before the government had renamed the Skopje international airport for Alexander the Great, while in 2009 it gave the same name to the country's main highway. Thus, when it officially appeared, Skopje 2014 was in fact a continuation of the antiquization politics of the VMRO-DPMNE government.

Makedonče – Macedonian

"The Project 'Skopje 2014' raised the head of the Macedonians up," said the then-prime minister Nikola Gruevski in a 2013 speech.[10] In our opinion this change is motivated by two "loci" that have contributed to the low self-esteem of many ethnic Macedonians. On one hand, there was a sociocultural phenomenon in Yugoslavia – the brotherly republics used to refer to Macedonians with the diminutive form – Makedonče, and on the other, "the siege mentality" as a result of the denial of the (ethnic) Macedonian identity markers by its neighbors, especially after independence in 1991. Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia disputed respectively the name of the state, the language, the church, etc.[11]

It seems that Skopje 2014 is trying to heal "the wounded ego"[12] of the ethnic Macedonians by transforming the diminutive form of the ethnonym into an augmentative. The monumentality of the sculptures and buildings and the domination of the neoclassicism and quasi-baroque are seen by some as signs of timelessness and uniqueness. Entire iconography is based on archetypes of domination, heroism, and pride (men on horses, arms, lions, soldiers, marble pillars/capitals, fountains/water, etc.).[13] The Medieval saints (Cyril, Methodius, Clement, and Naum) also serve as a reminder that Macedonia has been a cradle of Slavic literacy and Christianity. One particular complex is dedicated to the cult of motherhood and the "healthy" nation, visually represented by the cycle of birth and the happy royal (ancient Macedonian) family holding hands. The monument is in accordance with the traditional patriarchal values shared by many Macedonians, as well as with the government's campaigns for giving birth to at least three children and for the limitation of the right to abortion. The iconography of the happy royal family seems a model for the new Macedonian patriot.

A large group of sculptures, including the scenes and wax figures in the museum with the longest name in the world, should make ethnic Macedonians aware of their heroic and permanent resistance to the Ottomans from the seventeenth century and later during the revolutionary period in the first half of the twentieth century. The height of the "narrative" is embodied by the "Arch Macedonia," that is, the triumph of independent Macedonia, which depicts the national history in a linear and primordial perspective. The Minister of Culture, Elizabeta Kančevska-Milevska, in 2011 said, "'The Arch Macedonia' is the symbol of the great historical victory – the creation of the independent and sovereign Republic of Macedonia."[14]

The *story in stone and bronze* was accompanied by permanent media campaigns such as: "Macedonia timeless," "Macedonia – cradle of culture," "You are Macedonia," etc. At the same time, various sports and other popular manifestations, anniversaries, etc. have been carefully used to stimulate the ethno-national homogeneity in an act of *ritualization* (Mosse 2013). For example, celebrations of the Macedonian basketball team's fourth-place showing at EuroBasket 2011, and of the release in 2013 of a war criminal convicted in The Hague in relation to the 2001 armed conflict in Macedonia have been orchestrated in such a grandiose way as to strengthen the spirit of the nation and its ethnic cohesion.

Provincial vs. (metropolitan) European

The modernist square from the socialist era was now to resemble a European metropolis, although with a nineteenth-century outlook. Perhaps the project succeeded because most people are too poor to travel abroad and the numerous neoclassical facades, bridges, fountains, and so on, make them feel as if they are in Vienna, or Rome, or even Athens. At the same time, new/old Skopje sends a message to the (Western) world that it shares the same cultural codes with any other modern European capital. The mayor of Skopje, Koce Trajanovski, declared early on that "Skopje will become a real metropolis, like all other metropolises in Europe and in the Balkans."[15] In this context, the analysis of Neofotistos (2011, 304) on previous governmental use of ancient history seems useful in understanding the project as well:

> Their objective is not only to counter the criticisms of neighboring countries against the existence of Macedonian national identity but also to assert the political legitimacy of the Macedonian state in the international system: as Europe's ancient civilization, Macedonia should be treated as a legitimate, "modern," and already authentically "Western," state deserving of EU membership.[16]

The powerful concentration of identification myths (ancientness, continuity, statehood, victimization, heroism, permanent struggle, etc.)[17] set in the "living room of the nation" (Koteska 2011) obviously appeals to a considerable segment of ethnic Macedonian voters. Analyzing various aspects of the project, Čausidis (2013, 60) particularly points out the psychoanalytic dimension in the mobilizing power of the project, concluding that for

> the ordinary man standing as an ant at the bottom of these monuments, looking at the soles and hoofs of the figures in fact makes up for the poverty and powerlessness in which he/she exists, the humiliation he/she suffers from the neighboring countries (but also from his/her political leadership) as well as from his/her dissatisfaction with the size and power both of the nation and the state to which he/she belongs.

The alleged European dimension of Skopje 2014 can also be interpreted in different ways. D. Angelovska links this dimension with the need to overcome the Communist legacy on the one hand, and the Ottoman on the other. Discussing the aesthetics and the role of the new neoclassical buildings in the center of Skopje, she claims that "these serve a dual purpose as a counter-narrative both to the city's socialist egalitarian, functional, and modernist architecture and to its oriental Ottoman heritage" (Angelovska 2014). While we agree with her premise, we are prone to re-examine the place of the term "counter-narrative," which has a series of implied meanings. Skopje 2014 is in fact a master narrative, imposed by top-down governmental action, which Angelovska also stresses in the conclusion of her article.

   In the end, the very idea of establishing Skopje's identity as European, Christian, and bourgeois, as observed by Milan Mijalkovic and Katerina Urbanek, is a contradiction per se. Skopje is in its essence a multicultural and multi-layered urban space, both in its present and its past. Countering or rather erasing/hiding its Ottoman, oriental, socialist, modernist, and other cultural layers means at the same time imposing a hegemonic vision that resets the cultural history of the city. Again, Mijalkovic and Urbanek (2011) point out that the project "rejects the idea of the inherited hybridity of the city that is essential to its constitutive multiculturalism."

Mobilization axis 2: the "name dispute"

The long-lasting and bitter dispute with neighboring Greece over the name Macedonia and its heritage in the meantime has become a key hurdle on the country's path to EU and

NATO integration. The ruling party exploits this stalemate to present itself not only as representative of the "authentic will of the people" but also to legitimize its power. Ange-lovska (2014) points out that according to the new discourse/ideology created by VMRO-DPMNE, it "is the only true patriotic option because it fights for the independence and sovereignty of the country, while on the opposite side, there is the socialist and communist ideology that has betrayed those ideals."

The issues related to the politics of memory are not as simple as they appear. According to a survey by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (Kolozova et al. 2013), Yugoslavia and the national hero Goce Delčev[18] are still the basic identity markers of ethnic Macedonians. This study (probably the only one of its kind so far) done on the basis of interviews and focus groups, claims that there are "blatant discre-pancies between the ordinary citizen's perception of the 'true Macedonian' identity and that professed by the state."[19] On one hand this could mean that it is too early to see the results of the new and ongoing identity politics. On the other hand, this re-creation of national memory gradually gains importance for the many ethnic Macedonian voters, not so much vis-à-vis the recent Yugoslav/Communist past and its legacy, but much more, as we suggest, for external self-representation or "self-defense." This master nar-rative serves as an imaginary shield or even weapon against Greece in the name dispute and the international community. Interestingly, a recent poll shows a significant increase in those who oppose any compromise with Greece, from 45% in 2011 to 62% in 2013.[20]

In the right-wing populist policies of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party the created ima-ginary shield is a powerful political tool. It secures the party's role as custodians of the "wounded ego" of the Macedonians and defenders of the name and the identity "who fear neither Athens, nor Sofia, nor the international community in spite of the pressure for the name change" (Vangeli 2011).

Mobilization axis 3: against the internal "Other"

Besides the external Other, we suggest that Skopje 2014 has the potential to mobilize people against what is perceived as the internal Other – mostly ethnic Albanians, but also the entire political and civic opposition. There are two particular contexts that point to this argument.

On the one hand, there has been a sort of a "rivalry" in Skopje for a decade or two now, in which some ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, respectively, claim historical ownership of the city. Groups of mainly young people, mostly men, and often linked to football fan clubs or to political parties, have occasionally engaged in physical violence in order to secure that a particular city area "belongs" to their ethnicum. The major clash occurred on 13 February 2011 at the old fortress sector, the historical Kale, where a few hundred young men settled history disputes with fists (Stojanovski 2011). The issue at stake was whether to build a church/museum in the old fortress, or whether that area should be Christian or Muslim, Macedonian or Albanian. Some Macedonians believe that Albanians are newcomers imposing on Macedonian ethnic territory, while at the same time some Albanians believe that Macedonians are newcomers from the sixth century and that they are hiding the ancient Illyrian origin of Skopje. In this situation we suggest that the project, which managed to establish itself on the left bank of the Vardar river as well as to dominate the urban landscape, sends a message that Skopje will remain ethnic Macedonian forever. Discussing the urban landscape and architecture of Skopje (from the 1963 earthquake until today), Mijalkovic and Urbanek (2011) pointed

out that Skopje 2014 in fact fixed the line of ethnic division between Macedonians and Albanians in the city.

On the other hand, a simple look at the monuments gives the impression that it is a monoethnic and gender exclusive project,[21] paradoxically for a constitutionally proclaimed multiethnic state.[22] Women and ethnic Albanians (and other communities) are almost entirely absent. Albanian monuments such as Skanderbeg or Hasan Priština, paid for by private funds, do not belong to the project and are out of the larger main square area. On this issue, Angelovska (2014, 181) notes that

> in order to divert attention from this problem, a second city square is being constructed around a monument of Skanderbeg in the part of the city with an Albanian majority. The construction of two parallel city squares, one for Macedonians and another for Albanians, is again being financed entirely by the government.

The two "ethno" squares in fact further strengthen the ethnic division in the city. As early as 2009, Sam Vaknin, a former adviser to Gruevski, suggested that the so-called antiquization tends to marginalize ethnic Albanians and to exclude them from entering the Macedonian state and national identity.[23]

In that sense, we suggest that Skopje 2014 has the potential to mobilize ethnic Macedonians against ethnic Albanians by responding to constructed collective fear. By claiming ancient roots, the project sends a message for historical precedence, or a historical right to a territory ("we were here first"), against the same claim by ethnic Albanian nationalists.

Some prominent Albanian politicians and intellectuals in Macedonia have publicly raised their concern. Thus, the late Abdurahman Aliti (former leader of the Party for Democratic Prosperity, the first political party of the Albanians in Macedonia) declared, "In fact, the antiquization sends a message to Albanians that they are newcomers in this country and have nothing to do here." The journalist Sefer Tahiri claims, "This government wants to return the country to the pre-2001 period … to a mono-ethnic state consisting of Macedonians only" (Georgievski 2009). Paradoxically, besides protests like these, the Albanian coalition partner in the government (the Democratic Union for Integration) does not offer any serious criticism of the project. By stepping to the side, it acts in tacit agreement with its Macedonian coalition partner. An about-face by the then-deputy Prime Minister, Musa Xhaferi, is revealing. In September 2013, he told the Kosovo newspaper *Zeri* that "the project is a provocation for the Albanians," but on his return to Skopje he tried to calm the situation by claiming rather that "Actually, if you ask the Albanian public, it thinks that this project is a provocation, although perhaps it is not the project's goal."[24]

The implicit mobilization against the internal "Other" is not directed only toward ethnic Albanians. Actually, those citizens who dare to criticize the project are stigmatized and presented by pro-government media as "traitors," "Greek/Western mercenaries," "Sorosoids," and "Communists (*komunjari*)."[25] These citizens from various ethnic backgrounds are critically oriented intellectuals and civic activists primarily on the liberal left, who often criticize the government's anti-democratic politics, as well as the project itself. The project evidently has the potential, unintended by its commissioner, to mobilize citizens against the government, albeit on a smaller scale.

Mobilization axis 4: the global financial crisis and Euroscepticism

We shall now turn to our fourth point, that Skopje 2014 has the potential to mobilize people in reaction to the world financial crisis, and furthermore to prod them toward Euroscepticism, even though the government officially still declares EU aspirations.

Those who have regularly followed pro-government media in the last couple of years have likely noticed the criticism not only of the EU's handling of the financial crisis but also of the "Western" world in general. Very often TV news has reported in a binary fashion, where coverage of the EU's problems is followed by news on Macedonian prosperity. The basic message is that the Macedonian government manages to secure prosperity in times of global financial crisis, when even big and developed countries in the EU have serious difficulties. Government officials regularly state that Macedonia has managed to swim through the global crisis relatively unscathed. Gruevski claimed that " … in comparison to other countries Macedonia had the smallest losses during the difficult times." In this context, we suggest that Skopje 2014 also serves as a Potemkin village for the alleged current economic prosperity and has the potential to mobilize voters.

Yet the links between the project, the crisis, and mobilization go further. The manufactured negative image of the "West" is not limited to economics but actually serves to promote Euroscepticism. Intellectuals who support the policies of the right-wing government often claim that we need to search for alternative partners in foreign policy, most often meaning Putin's Russia and Erdogan's Turkey. Undoubtedly this is a complex problem, which encompasses not only the economy but also the "name dispute," international relations, etc. A recent study by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities suggests that the idea for Skopje 2014 is a result of a series of disappointments in EU politics toward Macedonia. The veto of Macedonia's invitation to join NATO at the 2008 summit in Bucharest caused "national" frustration in Macedonia. We wonder if besides securing votes for the government, the project can be discussed as a focal point in the mobilization toward Euroscepticism, or toward reorientation in Macedonian foreign policy. However, this presumption requires further investigation.

Conclusion

This paper examines Skopje 2014's potential to mobilize Macedonia's titular ethnic group in four areas in hopes that it might provoke further academic debate on this phenomenon in its regional and broader context. The project, which officials said was aimed at unifying ethnic Macedonians, in fact has produced several lines of political, intra-ethnic/interethnic as well as intra-cultural/intercultural divisions in Macedonia's fragile democracy. Its opponents (in the political, economic, cultural, or social sense), or the people who dislike the project and/or do not identify with it have been pushed aside and stigmatized as "traitors" to the (ethno-Macedonian) nation. They "stand" on the other side of the suggested mobilizing lines. While fostering homogenization, or rather "uniformization" of a significant portion of Macedonian citizens, the project actually reminds one of a deeply divided society. Furthermore, while officially countering Communist authoritarianism from the Yugoslav past, the project in fact reveals the ongoing authoritarian tendencies of the right-wing government.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. For a solid description and analysis of the museum see Angelovska (2014).

2. For example, an April 2014 article in the *Independent* claims that Macedonia is among the poorest countries in Europe: http://www.independent.mk/articles/3363/Macedonia+mong+the+Poorest+Countries+in+Europe. (Last accessed March 22, 2016.) About the costs of the project, see the detailed and latest investigation by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network: http://skopje2014.prizma.birn.eu.com/en. (Last accessed May 16, 2016.)

3. The term suggested by Brown and Stefoska (2010).

4. See, for example, articles in the international press: Davies (2011), Wölfl (2011), Mayer (2013), and "Skopje: The Future Is in the Past," Euronews, April 22. http://www.euronews.com/2013/04/22/skopje-the-future-is-in-the-past/. The recent critical reportage aired by Slovenian TV about Skopje 2014, http://4d.rtvslo.si/arhiv/osmi-dan-prispevki/174295467, provoked a severe reaction from the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party, http://netpress.com.mk/vmro-dpmne-so-reakcija-za-tekst-objaven-vo-rtv-slovenija/. (All last accessed September 25, 2014.)

5. About the various aspect of the project, see, for example, Grandits and Brunnbauer (2013).

6. On the construction of national identities of more than 20 European nations through history writing and their interrelationship with histories of ethnicity/race, class, and religion, see Berger and Lorenz (2008). About the various aspects of the past and its powerful constraints upon the way the present develops, see the remarkable Lowenthal (1985). On German Romanticism (monuments, ideology, and politics) in particular see Mosse (1975). A chapter from the book *L'estetica della politica* was translated into Macedonian and included in the collection of the essays in Bojadzievska and Talevska (2013).

7. The diminutive form Makedonče can be seen in older Macedonian folk songs, used as a vocative form, too, but without its pejorative meaning (e.g. the partisan song *A bre Makedonče*!). However, it is an interesting example of a collective self-perception, that is, expressing empathy toward Self. The diminutive "Makedonče," linguistically is a neutral gender denomination in the Macedonian language. It was probably created throughout centuries of living under domination, poverty, and authoritarian rule. It could be said that on the level of symbolic expression, the gaze of the Other (the powerful ruler or foreigner or neighbors, etc.) constructed the image (or apologetic strategy) that became inherent to collective self-perception. Cf. the useful analysis of the Balkan imaginary and collective self-perception by Dičev (2003) and Stefanovski (1997).

8. In an interview for the Ilinden radio station in Melbourne intended for the Macedonian diaspora, one of the artists involved in the project, Marjan Kamilovski, sees Skopje 2014 as a serious blow to Communist architecture and as a return to civic and classical architectural values. He stresses that key to the project is a focus of the continuity of the Macedonian nation, which he says is not really related to the Slavic migrations – a theory he considers false and imposed by German scholars from the nineteenth century. In his final message to listeners, the artist stresses (in Macedonian):

    > My message is that Macedonia is living through a national renaissance and, in general, a renaissance of the Macedonian identity. The most important thing in this whole issue is Macedonian continuity, and that is something that must not be conceded at any cost. I mean, there is no pardoning, no trading, and anyone with an intent to trade with the Macedonian identity or with the national history ... should be considered an enemy and should be ignored or impeded in an adequate manner.

    A transcript of the interview in Macedonian is available at http://www.radioilinden.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6915:2014&catid=156&Itemid=561.   (Last accessed September 5, 2014.)

9. For example, in 2009 the story broke that an American medium had talked to the spirit of Alexander the Great. A written summary from Kanal 5 TV is available at http://star.kanal5.com.mk/%28S%28dywzdg45jgdhxf45rfntyb55%29%29/default.aspx?mId=37&eventId=47621&egId=13. (Last accessed September 5, 2014.) In 2006 two senior scholars in the natural sciences (one university professor and one member of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts) claimed that part of the inscription on the Rosetta Stone (which they "deciphered") is not demotic, but rather ancient Macedonian, with similarities to the contemporary Macedonian language (Boševski and Tentov 2005). Their paper was later promoted (at home and abroad) as proof of ethnic continuity since antiquity. Ideas of continuity were then expressed in academia (Panov 2008), as well as in the press, cf. "We have the right to consider ourselves descendants of the ancient Macedonians" interview for *Utrinski Vesnik,* January 21, 2007: http://www.utrinski.

mk/?ItemID=66994D85619FB04BA1D2FC4575FD77FB. (Last accessed 05.09.2014.) Thus, later on, an unnecessary heated public debate began over the question, "Ancient or Slavs?"

10. Available at http://sitel.com.mk/gruevski-proektot-skopje-2014-ja-krena-glavata-na-makedon cite-vo-makedonija. (Last accessed September 4, 2014.)

11. The name Macedonia is perceived by Greece as an integral part of its national-Hellenistic culture; Bulgaria considers the Macedonian language a Bulgarian dialect; the Serbian Orthodox Church denies the autochephality of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

12. The expression "the wounded ego" was used in a policy brief by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje, titled "Skopje 2014 Project and its Effects on the Perceptions of Macedonian Identity among the Citizens of Skopje" (June 2013). The document is available at http://www.isshs.edu.mk/documents/1.-Sk2014-ENG.pdf. (Last accessed September 5, 2014.)

13. Aneta Georgievska – Šain, art historian, in an interview about Skopje 2014, for the Skopje website Okno. Available at http://okno.mk/node/23530. (Last accessed September 15, 2014.)

14. Interview for the magazine *Patokaz* no. 3, 2011, available at http://www.patokazmagazin.com. mk/index.php?option=com_zoo&task=item&item_id=310&Itemid=206&lang=mk. (Last accessed September 5, 2014.) Actually, since socialist times, one of the principal mainstream ideas of Macedonian national history was the romantic notion of a "Centuries-long struggle for independence;" reflected in the titles of major historical works and collections of documents, and still reflected today in the name of the new historical museum (see endnote 4) and in the symbolic function of the "Arch Macedonia."

15. http://www.dnevnik.mk/default-mk.asp?itemID= 0E0E411FE41FD9409C7B901F2E124033&arc=1. (Last accessed March 25, 2016.)

16. For another case, although very different from the Macedonian one, where a country's "deserving" membership in the EU is propagated through ancient history and cultural ties.

17. The discussion on historical and political myths in Macedonia and the region is already substantial (Vouri 2001; Brunnbauer 2004; Kølsto 2005; Stojanov 2010).

18. Goce Delčev (1872–1903) was a prominent figure in the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization at the end of the nineteenth century. He was responsible for (among other things) organizing armed groups across Macedonia in the struggle for independence from the Ottomans. In contemporary Macedonia he is widely perceived as the most significant revolutionary of that period and as the biggest national hero.

19. It is worth stressing that all of the participants in the study (both scholars and ordinary citizens) requested and were guaranteed anonymity. The authors point out that "the fear of publicly problematizing the project was explicitly expressed by virtually all of them." http://isshs.edu.mk/documents/1.-Sk2014-ENG.pdf. (Last accessed March 24, 2016.) The last known survey done by Brima Gallup in 2012 suggests that 57.8% of the population is against the project Skopje 2014. http://www.utrinski.mk/?ItemID=A1BDCDFF45EA764E8B7D444DBAC601C4. (Last accessed March 24, 2016.)

20. "The Name Dispute 2013" (published in early 2014) was conducted by the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis," and the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, and is available at http://www.idscs.org.mk/images/publikacii/idscs-macms-201312/sporot%20za%20imeto%20makedonija_2013.pdf. (Last accessed May 16, 2016.)

21. Furthermore, it is also gender exclusive. For the masculine domination of the cultural imagination and practice in Macedonia (including Skopje 2014), see Milevska, Suzana. "With Special Thanks to: A Balkan Curator in First Person Feminine," available at http://www.openspace-zkp.org/2013/en/journal.php?j=3&t=9. (Last accessed September 25, 2014); "Ágalma: 'The objet petit a,' Alexander the Great, and other excesses of Skopje 2014," available at http://www.e-flux.com/journal/agalma-the-objet-petit-a-alexander-the-great-and-other-excesses-of-skopje-2014/. (Last accessed September 25, 2014.)

22. The constitutional changes after the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001, especially amendment 4 from 16 November 2001, redefined Macedonia as a state of different ethnic communities. See http://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/UstavnaRmizmeni.pdf. (Last accessed September 5, 2014.)

23. Available at http://bit.ly/2hAMwuH. (Last accessed October 3, 2014.)

24. http://alsat.mk/index.php/vesti/od_zemjata/4906-%E2%80%98%D0%A1%D0%BA%D0%BE %D0%BF%D1%98%D0%B5-2014%E2%80%99,-%D0%8F%D0%B0%D1%84%D0%B5% D1%80%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B5-%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%B4%

D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D0%B4-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%82%
D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%81%D1%82.html. (Last accessed September 9, 2014.)
25. "Sorosoids" is a new epithet used by pro-government media against individuals or NGOs
working in cooperation with the Foundation Open Society Macedonia, that is, the Soros Foun-
dation (Nikolovski 2013).

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